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# Gifted Underachievers

Jean A. Walters

*Eastern Illinois University*

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GIFTED UNDERACHIEVERS

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GIFTED UNDERACHIEVERS

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(TITLE)

BY

JEAN A. WALTERS

FIELD STUDY EXPERIENCE

~~XX~~ **THESIS** ~~XX~~

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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EDUCATIONAL SPECIALIST

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

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GIFTED UNDERACHIEVERS

By  
Jean A. Walters

Field Experience Paper

July, 1988

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this field study was to research, identify and obtain a better understanding of the characteristics and causes of underachievement in gifted K-12 students today, and to compile strategies for the prevention and remediation of the underachievement. For five years the author has been a K-12 district coordinator of the gifted and has seen first hand the realistic problems that exist. Since underachievement among the gifted is receiving increasing attention in recent years, this particular study was deemed extremely pertinent and timely.

This field study and its findings are applicable to virtually any school district with relatively few modifications or adaptations. It is divided into four main chapters with various categories and sub-headings contained in each. Chapter one includes the statement of the problem, the limitations of the study, and the definition of terms. Chapter two is the review of the literature and includes the characteristics of gifted underachievers, special groups especially susceptible to underachievement, the causes of underachievement, and pressures experienced by gifted students which often contribute to their underachievement. Also included in Chapter two are six research studies that pertain to some aspect of the aforementioned.

Chapter three contains considerations for gifted identification and the results and conclusions of the research and study. Chapter four focuses on the recommendations for alleviating the problems of underachieving gifted students in the schools today. Also included in the chapter are recommendations for parents and schools that help prevent or remedy underachievement in gifted students.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

"If you treat an individual as he is, he will stay as he is, but if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought and could be."

Goethe 1

There exists a much larger population of intellectually gifted students in our public and private schools than what has previously been identified.<sup>2</sup> These oftentimes ignored and frequently unappreciated gifted students are not receiving recognition, assistance, differentiated curriculum, encouragement, or guidance because they are not achieving comparable to their abilities. The reasons for this underachievement are varied, complex, and numerous. The underachieving gifted student's talents may have been obstructed by physical handicaps, emotional and/or behavioral disorders, gender, cultural differences, environmental limitations (rural and urban), economical restraints, developmental delays, perfectionism, or learning disabilities. One consistent outgrowth of these

handicapping situations for the underachieving gifted students is the tendency to have low self-esteem and confidence. Without internal recognition of and belief in their own capacities, these students often have not and will not strive toward their potential.

It is the responsibility of the school administration to help educate the parents and teaching staff to recognize the characteristics of the gifted which may be masked by the handicapping situations surrounding the underachiever. Differentiated curriculum and proper guidance must be provided for these students so they will recognize their strengths and build upon them, to not only overcome any limiting situations, but also to strive to their intellectual and personal potential.

#### Statement of Problem

The high achieving, intellectually gifted children who excel in almost all they attempt usually portray many "teacher pleasing" characteristics and are easily recognized for placement in school gifted programs. These students are not too difficult to provide enrichment activities for and have enough internal motivation to perpetuate the learning environment arranged for them and generate more expanded and challenging activities for themselves. However, equally intellectually gifted students who are not high achievers and do not conform to

adult expectations for gifted students are more difficult to identify. When such students are identified as having superior intellectual ability, there is often much skepticism and disbelief on the part of teachers and parents alike. There is also a great deal of concern and uncertainty about the most beneficial placement and curriculum for these underachievers in the schools.<sup>3</sup>

Often the classroom teachers of these students believe the identified underachiever "does not deserve" placement in a gifted program because they are not doing the required classroom assignments in a satisfactory manner.

To better recognize, serve, and encourage these underachieving gifted students, it is necessary to redefine intellectual giftedness, dispel some myths surrounding giftedness, examine the causes for student underachievement, compile improved identification criteria and procedures, and explore ways to enhance their struggle for greater fulfillment of their capacities. If these students are to be successful in making gains toward their potential, they must develop more self-confidence and recognize their own strengths as well as develop techniques to work around their limitations. These underachieving gifted students are not capable of developing these coping strategies independently, and it is imperative that those of us in education become more aware of their present needs in order that we may better help

them. In an article on the gifted learning disabled student, Marcia Weill summarized:

"The twentieth century definition of 'gifted' in America is so cultural bound that children who are not outstanding in areas society values, especially scholastic performance, are not expected to make significant contributions to society as adults. Educators must commit themselves to identifying special talents in all students, expecting to find resources of skill and creativity among average and low achieving children. How many potential Edisons and Einsteins have already been overlooked?<sup>4</sup>

#### Limitation of the Study

This study shall be limited to research and literature produced within the last twenty-five years since it is the opinion of the author that any older information has been updated within this time period. The author's experience as a classroom teacher, gifted coordinator, and building principal is reflected in the conclusions and recommendations.

#### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this paper, intellectual giftedness will be interpreted in its broadest sense which is " ...the potential to achieve a higher degree of success in some area(s) of human endeavor than one's peers."<sup>5</sup> This definition is not in conflict with the national or state definition and also is flexible for students whose emotional, physical, or sociological limitations may be hindering them from attaining specific

levels on standardized testing. Since handicapped persons must compete in a world of mostly unhandicapped individuals, this definition of comparing them with normal peers may give a more accurate picture of their potential for success.<sup>6</sup> Underachievers shall be the discrepancy between a child's performance in the classroom and their intellectual ability.<sup>7</sup>

### Design of the Study

The research referenced in this study and additional information utilized to derive conclusions and recommendations in Chapters III and IV came from the fifty-eight sources listed in the bibliography, seventeen years experience in the classroom, five years experience as a gifted coordinator, and numerous conferences and workshops in the area of giftedness. In addition, the author attended the Second National Underachievement Workshop in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, July 11-15, 1988.

The Second National Underachievement Institute was an intensive five-day workshop with Dr. Sylvia Rimm and the psychologists from her Family Achievement Clinics. Guest speakers at the workshop included:

Dr. George Betts, professor, counselor, and author  
from the University of Northern Colorado

Dr. James Webb, professor, psychologist, and author  
from Wright State University



Dr. Felice Kaufmann, author and consultant for the  
gifted

Dr. Penny Kolloff, professor and author from Ball  
State University

Dr. Rimm presented to the entire group three times  
daily on the characteristics, causes and treatments for  
underachievement. She also provided explanations of  
testing instruments for underachievement, AIM and GAIM,  
and the implementation of her Trifocal Model. Special  
in-depth sessions attended by the author during the  
institute also included:

Divergent Thinking Strategies

School and Home Communication Strategies

The Autonomous Learner

Six Types of Giftedness Leading to Self-Actualization

Learning Disabilities and the Gifted

Attention Deficit Disorders with the Gifted

Special Problems with Gifted Girls

Classroom Strategies

Leading Parent Sessions

The institute included numerous case studies and this  
author also practiced test interpretation and counseling  
during the course of the week. This experience, coupled  
with the reading, provided the data base for the study and  
recommendations.

The years of job experience, the numerous training sessions and workshops, and especially the 2nd National Underachievement Institute have provided invaluable opportunities, knowledge, and skills necessary to arrive at the summations, conclusions, and recommendations contained in this study. Through scores of articles, books, ERIC searches, and other publications vast amounts of information have been gleaned and filed for use by the author. Days of workshops and institutes have made it possible to compare, analyze, and evaluate ideas, concepts, theories, and facts needed for assertions, interpretations, and conclusions made in this report.

## CHAPTER II

### Rationale

The researcher is a fourth grade classroom teacher, building administrator, and the gifted coordinator for a K-12 district. Underachievement of some gifted students continually reappeared each year as students were screened for identification in the district gifted program. Some students with very high standard scores on the Cognitive Abilities Tests did not have corresponding high achievement test scores. When their current teachers were requested to complete a Teacher Observation Scale on them, the teachers were often quite surprised that the designated students might even be considered for placement in the gifted program. If students had high enough ability scores to qualify for the program without the achievement test scores or the Teacher Observation Scale, the current teachers frequently disagreed with the placements because they pointed out that the students were not doing the required work at the current grade level so how could they be considered gifted? The ability test scores were reaffirming to this researcher that the child truly could do the work at the current grade level and had

chosen not to or due to a chronic lack of effort and mastery of materials presented might now be deficient in some of the academic areas. None the less, the child was intellectually gifted and it became imperative to learn more about the various types of gifted underachievers so the author might recognize underachievement, help train the staff to recognize underachievers, and learn ways to work with both groups to provide the needed programs for the underachievers' skills and abilities. As a classroom teacher and building administrator, much of this same information might also be modified to use with the children of average or above average ability.

Some educators and parents believe the Cannonball Theory concerning gifted children. That belief purports gifted children cannot be stopped from achieving any more than a cannonball after it has been fired can be diverted from its course.<sup>8</sup> The research and case studies not only disprove that theory, but some sources claim that as high as 50% of our gifted students to be underachieving.<sup>9</sup> Some are underachieving so successfully that no one even realizes they are gifted. This underachievement of our intellectually gifted students is not limited to those with extenuating circumstances of race, socio-economic levels, family histories, gender, or physical conditions.

Underachievement can be documented in students with straight A averages as well as those with D's or F's, because underachievement is not working up to one's ability and in the intellectually gifted that ability may be very high while the requirements for A's are much lower. These children will at some time suffer repercussions if they are not identified as underachievers and gain access to appropriately challenging programs.<sup>10</sup> These children are earning superior grades at the level of instruction below which they are intellectually and motivationally ready.<sup>11</sup> By better understanding the characteristics and causes of underachievement the educators can identify the students needing assistance and help them strive toward their potential.

### Review of the Literature

#### Characteristics of Underachievers

Gifted underachievers are not readily recognized because their intellectual giftedness has been overshadowed by behaviors impeding achievement. Many go unidentified as gifted or as underachievers because they are not necessarily failing. They are merely not achieving comparable with their ability. Dr. Sylvia Rimm lists



characteristics of the underachiever as:

Unfinished work and disorganized

Dissimilarity of skills

Social extremes

Highly creative

Manipulative - dependent or dominant

Competitive<sup>12</sup>

The reasons for the unfinished work may vary from working too slowly or carelessly in elementary schools to forgetfulness and apathy at the junior and senior high levels. Gifted underachievers usually have high verbal skill and may read early but often have a "pencil anxiety" for any written requirement. High creativity is also a drawback for some students because in the classroom the student improvises on assignments so much or gets so involved in one aspect that the project is not completed. Socially, the underachiever is usually either a loner who relates much better with adults than peers or highly social at the expense of his/her work. Many underachievers also lack a sense of locus of control and do not see any relationship between their efforts and the results. They frequently want extreme fame or fortune but have no idea of how to attain it because they see no connection between what they do and what they want. Underachievers are also highly competitive, although many

do not appear so on the surface. They want to win or be number one and cannot stand losing. Because of this extreme distaste for losing, many underachievers will abstain from any activities where their winning is not assured. According to Rimm, underachievers are virtually all manipulative.<sup>14</sup> The underachievers range from the dependent manipulators, who are the nice, passive students who always feel that they need help or the assurance that they are doing the assignment correctly to the dominant manipulators who feel compelled to argue or nag. These manipulators bait the school verses the parents, mothers verses fathers, and counselors verses teachers. Oftentimes, they do not understand that they are manipulators until high school. Dominants usually make the adults the enemy and generally feel that no one understands or cares and that everyone always tells them "no".<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Joann Whitmore lists characteristics similar to Rimm's and cites some additional ones:

Vast gap between qualitative level of oral\written  
work

Test phobic

Single area interest, they are "experts"

School phobia, complete disinterest in attendance and  
participation

Low self-esteem and unhealthy self-concept

Focus on self and resistance to influence  
Inability to function constructively in a group  
Tendency to set goals and standards too high  
No apparent satisfaction from acquired skills  
Not motivated by devices, praise, enthusiasm,  
rewards, etc.  
Low academic initiative  
Distractibility  
Immaturity in all areas  
General hyperactivity  
Inattentive  
Psychomotor inefficiency, most often visual perception  
Attributes success or failures to external controls  
Excessive absences due to hypochondria, frequent  
illnesses, and malingering<sup>16</sup>

Underachievers also frequently did not identify with their same-sex parents. A few underachievers identified very strongly with the same sex-parent if the parent appeared to the child to be an underachiever or if the child felt the parent was giving messages that school work avoidance was acceptable.<sup>17</sup> Shaw and White (1965) and Teahan (1963) reaffirmed this with their studies on female high school and college students. They found that girls with the high grades consistently viewed themselves more like their mothers than their fathers.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the characteristics mentioned, the more recent literature revealed that there are five general categories of students that are commonly overlooked for gifted identification because of their achievement. The characteristics and causes in some cases are similar however each subgroup merits individual attention. Those five subcategories are: preschool/primary, culturally different, handicapping situations, gender, and developmental delays or chronic illness.

#### Preschool/Primary

Preschool and primary (grades K-3) children have been classified by Whitmore as probably the largest underserved population of gifted students.<sup>19</sup> One of the major reasons she cites for this is because many psychologists and educators do not believe that children can accurately be identified before ages 8 or 9. The use of achievement tests for gifted identification miss several students because primary age children are limited in the ways they can excel before they have learned the basic concepts and skills.<sup>20</sup> Another factor is the primary teachers' difficulties in identifying pupils for referral with advanced achievement as the foremost criterion. Although these teachers appear more knowledgeable about their individual students than teachers in higher grades, they

often overlook the giftedness of the students and label them as "just good students".<sup>21</sup>

Karnes and Johnson point out that gifted identification and programming are often postponed until children are 9 years old because they are easier to identify. Children of this age tend to be more stable in their performance and there are a greater number of standardized instruments appropriate for gifted identification. They also mention that parents usually have not been as vocal to school authorities concerning appropriate programming for their children until about fourth grade. The third factor they listed in the omission of recognition of gifted underachievers in the primary grades is the lack of training the gifted specialists have received concerning the young gifted, both in identification and programs for them.<sup>22</sup> Unless these students are recognized and assisted earlier in their education by the middle grades, this underachievement will have become a genuine life style and the children may have developed deficits in some academic skills. The older a child becomes before the underachievement is identified and addressed, the greater the needs for remediation and the longer the process.<sup>23</sup>



### Culturally Different

Giftedness is found in all segments of our society. However, the measurement instruments frequently utilized for gifted identification draw heavily on white, middle-class language, vocabulary, experiences, and values. Many of these instruments are loaded with items dependent on this environment.<sup>24</sup> Because there are not "culture free" tests currently available, it becomes imperative that the school authorities select tests which are appropriate for the age level and population being tested.<sup>25</sup>

Several cultural traits and values handicap children in the regular school environment and in testing situations. These learned tendencies need to be taken into consideration when identifying children for gifted programs. Bilingualism is common among immigrant groups and bilingual children have varying levels of proficiency in each language. Their English proficiency often lags in unfamiliar situations, such as testing.<sup>26</sup>

Mexican-Americans frequently speak a combination of English and Spanish and even create original words by using both languages in new manipulations<sup>27</sup> Oriental children frequently do not respond readily to test examiners. Their families have stressed modesty, especially in girls, and so these children sometimes

hesitate to answer "knowledgeably" for fear they might seem boastful. American Indians have been trained to exhibit cooperative behavior and will frequently try to help each other during testing.<sup>28</sup> All of these traits are handicapping to the culturally different child during standardized testing situations.

Henry Collins, Director of the National Association for Gifted Children in London, found that many middle-class and lower-class English parents considered it shameful to have produced gifted children and often subtly encouraged them to conceal their giftedness to protect the family name. Collins also found the reverse could be true as a few parents seek recognition vicariously through their children's achievements.<sup>29</sup>

Children living in rural or sparsely populated areas have disadvantages that can lead to underachievement also. Due to their location, they are isolated from intellectual stimulation and learning resources. They are sometimes unsophisticated, uninformed, and lacking in social and learning skills. They have been deprived culturally and educationally.<sup>30</sup>

Davis and Rimm noted that the culturally different and economically disadvantaged children in large urban centers, in poor rural areas, and on Indian reservations rarely are identified or described as gifted. Others assume that these culturally disadvantaged's formal

educational needs are only the basic skills. Davis and Rimm also found these children's adjustment to school and learning almost always involves strict discipline. The "...cultural and language differences and the lack of exposure to mainstream American culture usually combine to obscure from society the gifted children among them. These gifted minority and disadvantaged children typically proceed invisibly through school until they drop out or, with luck, graduate."<sup>31</sup>

### Handicapping Situations

Of all of the current research on underachieving gifted on the market, the most abundant is that on the gifted students with handicaps. These handicaps-physical, social, sensory, emotional, or learning are the main focal point of the child's education and overshadow the fact that he/she has high intellectual ability. These students are further disadvantaged by being placed in programs designed solely for their handicap.<sup>32</sup>

"Depending on the level of intellectual ability and the severity of the learning difficulties, the gifted/learning disabled may either be identified as learning disabled with giftedness masked by the handicapping condition, or may be functioning at or near grade level, in which case both the learning disability and giftedness goes undetected."<sup>33</sup>

In regular classrooms, normally achieving gifted students tend to be more disruptive, less respectful to adults, and less respectful toward the property of others. Learning

disabled gifted students are generally quieter, more passive, more asocial, and less accepted by their peers.<sup>34</sup>

The gifted/learning disabled student experiences frustration over the discrepancies between his/her expectations and performance. [This frustration may result in lower self-esteem and cause him/her to withdraw into a fantasy world, to stop trying,] or to use aggressive behaviors. All of these destructive behaviors distract the teachers from identifying the student's real needs for challenges and remediation.<sup>35</sup> The gifted/learning disabled child often exhibits four academic characteristics:

1. Good but narrow and unsophisticated vocabulary
2. Tendency to ponder and react slowly, especially in language arts
3. Inflexible approach to problem solving
4. Difficulty in adapting to new routines <sup>36</sup>

Suter and Wolf noted that gifted/learning disabled students' strengths usually lie in reasoning and problem solving and their weaknesses are more evident in activities involving long and short term memory.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to learning disabilities, other handicapping situations may conceal the student's giftedness from the ordinary screening. Handicaps which interfere with cognitive development could include the

hearing and visually impaired or severe orthopedic victims. Deafness and neurological impairment would also interfere with superior intellectual abilities because of the difficulties in taking standardized tests.<sup>38</sup> So often parents and educators devote all of their attention to the handicapping situation and weakness and fail to realize the child's strengths and capabilities. Special educators are not trained in the identification and programming of above average or gifted handicapped children. These educators seldom create programs centered around the handicapped child's areas of strengths. Gifted educators are equally negligent due to their lack of training in understanding and meeting the needs of the handicapped child.<sup>39</sup>

"Giftedness will out", or the Cannonball Theory, rarely holds true for any children, but it is even less likely to be true for the handicapped, whose disabilities may obscure talents and hamper their development.<sup>40</sup>

#### Gender

Kirk and Gallagher cite gifted girls as the largest group of untapped intellectual potential in the country.<sup>41</sup> Gifted girls tend to be overlooked in the gifted identification procedures and to be discouraged from pursuing certain careers, especially in math and

science, and to become socialized into traditional societal roles.<sup>42</sup>

Another drawback for gifted females is the tendency for girls to relate their failures to inadequate ability, and their successes to luck or other people's help. Over the years, girls lose confidence in their achievement abilities. Boys, however, appear to perceive their successes as a reward for their abilities, but their failures to bad luck. In time, this approach helps boys gain confidence and have better self-esteem.<sup>43</sup> Teachers nearly always attribute girls' failures to intellectual inadequacies and boys' failures to lack of effort or motivation. This error gives the subtle message that the girls "don't have the ability" to do the work successfully, but the boys have the ability and just did not use it.<sup>44</sup>

Three other internal barriers working against gifted females are the Horner Effect, Cinderella Effect, and the Imposter Phenomenon. The Horner Effect is the tendency for females to underachieve when competing with males despite their exceptional ability, and to not be able to explain the reason.<sup>45</sup> The Cinderella Complex is the fear of success and the desire to be cared for. This is often seen in dependent gifted girls in school and may be perpetuated through life.<sup>46</sup> Girls who experience the Imposter Phenomenon maintain a strong belief that they are

not as intelligent as everyone thinks they are and someday everyone will find out they have been an imposter.<sup>47</sup>

In 1971, Judith Bardwick wrote that boys' self-esteem is achievement based where girls' esteem is acceptance based. Girls are dependent upon others and reinforced by others for nurturing their own self-esteem. They do not find esteem within themselves because such esteem comes only when an individual sets goals and frequently achieves them.<sup>48</sup>

#### Developmental Delays and Chronic Illness

Some of the underachieving gifted children are labeled immature or language disabled during their early years when they are merely developmentally delayed, which time and maturation cure.<sup>49</sup> These children could be physically immature or mildly motor impaired and their difficulties in school are attributed to laziness or lack of practice rather than the developmental delays. This stereotyping also happens to children whose exceptional ability is not in all areas. Rather than recognizing their giftedness in specific areas, educators tend to blame the areas where their achievement is not as high on lack of motivation, effort, and self-discipline rather than a delay in development.<sup>50</sup> Parents sometimes push their children into formal schooling situations before they are socially or emotionally ready.<sup>51</sup> Once again,



the immature behavior or lack of adjustment of the child would interfere with the recognition of his/her giftedness.

Chronic illness can also be a factor camouflaging high ability in a child. Besides the numerous absences and missed lessons due to illness, which would handicap any learner, some children suffer from biologically induced fatigue. What would appear to an observer as laziness, lack of motivation, or apathy could be the reaction to a low-grade infection which has gone undiagnosed and treated for months or years.<sup>52</sup> A long term evaluation of students academic achievements and scores on standardized testing would need to be used to signal this type of underachievement.

### Causes

The causes of underachievement in gifted students are as diverse as the affected population. Whitmore lists five principal factors she feels contributes to underachievement:

1. Lack of general academic motivation
2. Academic skill deficit
3. Lack of environmental nurturance
4. Developmental delays or chronic poor health
5. Specific disabilities



Whitmore feels it is likely that the greatest percentage of underachieving gifted are those who are underserved by the schools, this especially affects those who are economically or geographically disadvantaged, are from culturally different communities, or are disabled students.<sup>53</sup>

Whitmore states that lack of general achievement motivation may be a single cause in many cases of underachievement. These students have highly advanced interests and cognitive abilities, including exceptional creativity and analytical skills, and feel the curriculum is boring or unrewarding compared to their out-of-school independent learning activities. Emotional conflict and a preoccupation with personal and social needs and feelings are also common and result in low achievement motivation at school.<sup>54</sup>

Academic skill deficits may occur with underachievers for two, very different, reasons. Usually this deficiency is due to earlier difficulties in acquiring these skills because of lack of readiness for the instructional program. They are then tracked in a slower group and negative attitudes and self-expectations occur. Another, less frequently noticed, reason for academic deficiencies in the higher achieving students is created when teachers fail to pretest for entry knowledge and skills and the

instruction is inappropriate because of the student's lack of prerequisite knowledge.<sup>55</sup>

Rimm purports the causes for underachievement start much earlier in a child's life (than Whitmore). She believes most underachievement patterns are initiated in the first years of life.<sup>56</sup> Her five causes for underachievement are:

1. Initiating situation
2. Excessive power
3. Inconsistency and opposition
4. Inappropriate classroom environment
5. Competition

The initiating situation Rimm refers to is an attention addiction created by an overwelcome, gifted, handicapped, or ill child. Parents who desire to do or give everything to this child or see the child as their only purpose foster this. Sometimes life circumstances such as death of a parent, divorce, or a dramatic change in environment can also lead to this syndrome. Multiple caretakers (grandparents, sitters, aunts, uncles, etc.) also add to this attention addiction and when a child reaches a situation where they are no longer the center of attention, as in the start of school or a sibling being born, the underachievement pattern begins to regain, whether consciously or unconsciously, attention. Rimm states, "There is almost always an identifiable point

where telltale symptoms began, although the obvious underachievement characteristics may not show themselves until later."<sup>57</sup>

Rimm also states that excessive childhood power is characteristic of all underachievers.<sup>58</sup> These children have too much power but feel they have too little. This manipulation may appear in either a dependent or dominant mode and the child may not even realize it, but rather it seems comfortable and successful to them. Either way, they manipulate others to avoid their own responsibilities. The dependent personalities know all the right buttons to push to get gratification by working sympathy and assistance. Personalities of this mode show no initiation. However, parents and teachers respond readily to their pleas for help. These children are usually passive, nice students who create no behavior problems in school and can maintain this "take care of me" pattern throughout school, or in some cases life. Dominant children are the exact opposite, as they are in frequent struggles for power. They consistently pressure parents, teachers, and peers to conform to their preferences. Dominants only play games where they will win or be the star and often are in arguments or debates. They make the adults the enemy and the reason for their underachievement. Both dependents and dominants refuse to live within the parameters set by their parents and

teachers and push either passive aggressively or overt aggressively.<sup>59</sup>

Rimm contends that inconsistency and oppositional situations early in a child's life leads to underachievement. Inconsistency can be with one parent or several caretakers, and the child responds by doing the least amount requested. Opposition occurs between parents or caretakers and the child sees one parent, or caretaker, as the "ogre", because they are more demanding, and always goes to the "sheltering" parent for empathy. The sheltering parent protects the child against the parent setting expectations or parameters and the child consistently escapes living up to the higher expectation.<sup>60</sup>

The fourth cause for underachievement listed by Rimm was inappropriate classroom environments. In the case of the dependent child, teachers often unconsciously perpetuate this style by consistently helping them before they exert any effort or even request help. Typical teaching approaches which work quite well with achieving children may preserve the passivity of the dependent child and enhance the confrontational stance of the dominant one. Classroom situations may also fall victim to the "ogre" factor of opposition mentioned earlier. Students may convince their parents that the school does not meet

their needs or understand their situation. Parents unintentionally perpetuate this strand of underachievement by agreeing that the school or teacher does not meet the child's needs or by reflecting on their own negative experiences in school. Classrooms with insufficient challenges and unstimulating environments also can contribute to a highly talented student performing below their ability.

Rimm's final cause for underachievement is the lack of skills to cope with competition. The competition may be in the form of sibling rivalry or may occur in school or extracurricular situations. Gifted students are especially prone to feel that only one person can win so everyone else becomes a loser. Underachievers do not see any relation with their efforts and moving closer to attain a goal, but rather only the defeat. This failure at not being number one often causes a loss of confidence and at the least a temporary stop in effort.<sup>61</sup>

Rimm says that in her counseling clinic almost always four out of the five causes are present in each referral.<sup>62</sup> She states that in addition to these causes and environments that perpetuate the underachievement syndrome, bright children are under pressure which, when coupled with their lack of locus of control, leads to

further underachievement. The pressures on gifted children include:

- Pressure to be brilliant
- Pressure to be creative
- Pressure to do something spectacular
- Pressure to find one's self
- Pressure to be popular
- Pressure to be good
- Pressure to be the best sibling<sup>63</sup>

The pressure to be brilliant is sometimes an outgrowth of a misconceived notion that to be gifted means everything must come easily, or at least appear to be easy. If they have to show a great deal of effort to accomplish their tasks, it would mean they are less brilliant than what was previously believed. The children suffering from this pressure may continually monopolize classroom discussions or may put down everyone else as "dumb" to elevate their own intelligence. The pressure to feel very intelligent is a motivating factor until it becomes too extreme and then they invent or discover activities to avoid learning.<sup>64</sup>

The pressure to be creative is so strong in some gifted children that there are no areas in school unique enough for their expression, thus, they withdraw. The



students see creativity in themselves as unusual, different, and nonconforming.<sup>65</sup>

The pressure to be spectacular occurs in the students who were mentioned earlier that desire to become very rich or famous but see no relationship between their efforts and their goal. They have no sense of the process or the practice so they expect this good fortune to come to them with little or no effort on their part because they avoid competition.<sup>66</sup>

The pressure to find one's self come to the children who are addicted to attention. During adolescence they fluctuate from the desire to be admired and noticed to total separation where no one sees their struggle with their own identity. These efforts with individualization bring anguish and depression as the adolescent swings from delight with the audiences to a new sense of separateness.<sup>67</sup>

The pressure to be popular is extremely common in a gifted child from preadolescence through high school. The desire to be accepted by peers and be popular leads many gifted children to minimize their talents. Depending on their peer groups, the popular message may involve athletics, music, drama, government, dress, alcohol, promiscuity, or musical taste, but it definitely does not include all A's or an excitement for learning. Since

students rarely feel popular enough, this pressure continues to increase.<sup>68</sup>

The pressure to be good encourages underachievement because gifted students undertake less than they are capable of so they will never appear less than perfect. By alternating accomplishing the simple tasks and avoiding the difficult ones they do not build an inner sense of self-control or self-esteem. Their extreme desire to please leaves these perfectionists very dependent on the opinion of others and susceptible to depression.

The pressure to be the best sibling accompanies the perfectionist and attention addicted personalities. These gifted students see every family situation as having a winner and loser and their self-worth comes only from being smarter, better, or more successful than their siblings. If there is a reversal of underachievement by one child in the family, the other will feel negative responses and this often precipitates underachievement in them.<sup>69</sup>

All of these pressures contribute to underachievement in children because they lack a locus of control and have not internalized the relationship between their efforts and the outcome.<sup>70</sup>

Dr. Sylvia Rimm proposed a Trifocal Model to work with gifted underachievers. It is designed to have the school, parents, and child working together to help break



the underachievement pattern and to remove factors from the child's home and school environments which fostered that underachievement. Initially the child takes a personal inventory, GAIM (Group Achievement Identification Measure), and the parents complete similar ones, AIM (Achievement Identification Measure), on the child. The GAIM is only recommended by Rimm if the child is ten years of age or older because of the reading level. In the Family Achievement Clinics, Rimm and her psychologists rely much more on the AIM results when designing corrective strategies. AIM and GAIM gives scores in the areas of: competition, responsibility, control, achievement communications, and respect. The responses on the instruments are analyzed by the Educational Assessment Service and scores from 1-10 are received in each of the five categories taking into consideration the child's age and sex. Using this information the counselor or administrator can determine if the child: is dependent or independent, respectful or oppositional, organized or irresponsible, enjoys competition or sees it as a threat, and what messages of consistency are coming from the home.<sup>71</sup>

Currently Rimm and her associates are norming an instrument for the teacher's assessment of the child. From the AIM and GAIM results and separate parent and child interviews, intervention strategies can then be

planned to help the child break the underachievement cycle and assist the family and school in creating better environments in which to overcome their underachievement life style.<sup>72</sup>

### Research Review

The research within the last twenty-five years on underachieving gifted students has been scant. Most of it compares its results with the Terman research from the 1920s. This study will deal with six of the more recent research projects involving gifted underachievers.

### RAPYHT

The Retrieval and Acceleration of Promising Handicapped Talented project at the University of Illinois from 1975-81 and was the only complete program in the nation for young gifted/handicapped students.<sup>73</sup> Sixteen male and 12 female handicapped preschool children were identified as having special gifts and talents. These children had physical handicaps, visual and hearing impairments, learning disabilities, and/or behavior disorders. In addition to an array of handicapping conditions, the majority of these children had speech and language deficits. The RPYHT consisted of general programming, talent screening and identification, talent assessment, family involvement, and ongoing education. It

emphasized: strengths of the children rather than weaknesses, giving the students special programming compatible with their talents, fostering a nurturing environment for all (gifted and nongifted), programming to meet each child's special needs, and the critical role of parents as educators and advocates of their handicapped children.<sup>74</sup>

The long term effects of the study showed that all of the gifted/handicapped and all of the other children functioned more positively from the program. Ninety percent of the children receiving the program were not considered handicapped and were placed in regular classrooms when they left RPYHT. Positive effects were found in parents' relations with their handicapped children because of the new emphasis on the child's strengths. Success experiences had a positive affect on the self-esteem of not only all the gifted/handicapped children but all of the other children as well. "The realization that some handicapped children have gifts and talents can improve both the cognitive and affective interactions between teachers and children. Further, unveiling of an unusual strength can provide an avenue for alleviating a handicap."<sup>75</sup>

## Locus of Control

Robert Kanoy cited research done in Burlington, North Carolina, on 20 achieving and 9 underachieving gifted fourth graders for the positive relationship of academic achievement with locus of control and self-concept. The children received the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire and the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The results showed achievers to have significantly higher self-concepts than underachievers on intellectual and school status sub tests. Achievers also had significantly higher internal locus of control scores than underachievers. Achievers and underachievers did not differ significantly on the total self-concept score or on the behavior and physical subtests. There were no sex differences for either self-concept or locus of control. This study revealed that achievers are more willing to accept responsibility for negative achievement experiences than underachievers, and both are willing to accept responsibility for positive experiences.<sup>76</sup>

## Cupertino Project of Underachievement (UAG)

In the early years of the project (1968-70) the students were 100 % successful in reversing patterns of early school failure and severe socio-emotional maladjustment and becoming highly motivated, successful

participants in the gifted program. Twenty-two children, in grades 2 or younger, from 27 elementary schools in Cupertino, California, were placed in a self-contained class for underachieving children. These students had a Binet or WISC IQ scores of 140 or higher, but all had either been candidates for retention or had been retained.<sup>77</sup> They were consistently described by parents and past teachers as lazy, messy, immature, careless, undisciplined workers, having no friends, having a negative attitude toward school, and having a low self-esteem. The original referrals were 95% male. In subsequent years concerted efforts were made to obtain at least a minimum number of females. The behavior problems clustered in two groups, Approximately 25% were "acute withdrawals" with apparent immunity to teacher influence and 75% displayed "highly disruptive, aggressive, attention seeking behaviors".<sup>78</sup> Unlike the earlier Rimm literature, Whitmore found no consistent pattern of characteristics of the families.<sup>79</sup> Whitmore credits the success of her program to the removal of academic pressures and social alienation coupled with intensive efforts to modify self-perceptions.<sup>80</sup> Whitmore maintains that in the first three or four years of school children gradually formulate the self-concept that predicts the future outcomes of their efforts in school and creates expectancies for future successes and

failures. Because she believes the first years of school to be so crucial to prevent or reverse tendencies for underachievement by shaping the child's behaviors and perceptions in a positive way, she contends that intervention must be within those first three years to be the most effective.<sup>81</sup>

#### Learning Enrichment Activity Program (LEAP)

This project in New Haven, Connecticut, was developed as a family enrichment program to support families of highly creative gifted children from urban, lower-class, black backgrounds. The children selected were transferred from their home schools to a magnet school, where most of the children were white and from middle-class homes. Those participants were identified using test scores where non-verbal scores were weighted twice as much as the verbal. When they first began, all suffered "academic shock" with their grades dropping from A's and B's to D's and F's. To help maintain better home environments, white, middle-class home study enrichment leaders went to the clients' houses weekly during the school year.

Teachers reported that the LEAP children were more open and cooperative than the other students, however they did not focus enough on school activities. Even the most academically ambitious LEAP families could not sustain the needed homework settings for the school year. Students



consistently reverted back to the neighborhood values and pasttimes. Although the enrichment leader helped, this pattern was not changed in any of the children. Teachers also admitted they were less demanding of the LEAP children.<sup>82</sup>

#### Astor Program

The Astor Program involved identifying gifted children, ages 4-8, in New York City with a population of over a million students and thirty-two school districts. To insure equal opportunities for students of all cultures and to reflect the diversity of the city in the program's enrollments, parents were notified by the schools and on local foreign radio stations and in foreign newspapers. In a further attempt to make the identification fair to all cultures, the interviewers, psychologists, and test examiners were reoriented about the various populations and cautioned to concentrate on the strengths instead of the problems and misbehaviors of the children. Concerning the identification process in general, Ehrlich believed, "...too many teachers at all levels rarely recognize even the highly gifted child if other behaviors are less than desirable or below the norm."<sup>83</sup> Because of this, an intensive training was necessary before teacher nominations were effective. In addition to cultural differences cited earlier, Ehrlich noted that the Puerto

Ricans did not like to have their children travel away from home and many excluded their children from the program. She also remarked that many of the cultures viewed the sexes differently in terms of achievement and advancement. They did not recognize giftedness in girls and did not seem concerned about providing them with the same opportunities as the boys.<sup>84</sup> She also confirmed Collins' earlier reference to parents with limited education often not having high expectations for their children. Ehrlich pointed out that these parents' lack of experiences with the educational process made it difficult for them to align their priorities and conform to the demands of the special program. She noted that the reverse could also be detrimental as she found some parents of children with superior ability assumed their gifted behavior was normal and did not recognize it as giftedness. In families where the first born was gifted, younger siblings were often judged against the high standard of the older child and these younger children were deemed by the parents to be normal, when in fact they were also gifted.<sup>85</sup>

Dr. Ehrlich concluded that there were reliable indicators of giftedness in the culturally diverse and she felt parents were excellent identifiers of gifted children. Significant traits mentioned by parents were: reading ability, insight, exceptional vocabulary, thinking



ability, capacity for symbolic thought, sensitivity, and early development. The Astor Program found the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale to be the most reliable test instrument for this age group (4-8 years) and the WISC-R a good second choice.<sup>86</sup>

#### MGM-GATE

The MGM-GATE research was conducted on junior college students at Fullerton College in Fullerton, California. Although this field study only addressed gifted underachievers through grade 12, MGM-GATE is pertinent because it compiled achievers and non-achievers perceptions of factors which affected their high school achievement levels. The MGM-GATE study involved 34 students who had high potential but were low achievers (below 2.99 GPA) in high school, 36 students with high potential who were high achievers (3.00-4.00 GPA) in grades 9-12, and 53 students who belonged to neither group.

The high potential-low achievers more often described themselves as: defensive, demanding, opinionated, resentful, headstrong, rebellious, undependable, deceitful, given to excess, wary, cool, distant in their relationships, self-centered, impatient, changeable, forgetful, insightful, humorous, informal, adventurous, idealistic, assertive, egotistical, sarcastic, cynical,

and concerned with personal pleasures and diversions. The students with high potential-high achievement described themselves as: conscientious, responsible, self-denying, conforming, and prone to wish to make a good impression. Their responses showed them to have less defensiveness, resentment, and rebelliousness than the low achievers. The high achievers were more straight forward, honest, uninhibited, industrious, sincere, and steady. They also exhibited good impulse control, were cordial, and were prone to exercise reasonable self-interest and interest in others.<sup>87</sup>

Results of the MGM-GATE project showed the high achievers to have a stronger desire to achieve and they put forth more effort to do what was expected of them. Low achievers tried to manipulate, coerce, force, and "con" others into granting special favors or privileges. These underachievers were made up of more males than the achievers and the underachievers came from homes with a working mother more often. The low achievers credited others less often with encouragement and the males of this group were much less likely to give their fathers credit for emotional support. The underachievers in the study also had three times more recreational activities than the achievers.<sup>88</sup>

The MGM-GATE study reaffirmed many of the concepts mentioned in the earlier research concerning self-esteem,

locus of control, same-sex parent modeling, manipulators, and dominant personalities.

#### Uniqueness of the Study

This study is unique in that it concentrates its investigations on the characteristics, causes, and cures for underachievement in gifted children. It addresses students with high intellectual academic potential from preschool through grade 12. The study will assimilate recommendations for the identification of underachieving gifted students and provide suggestions for home and school strategies to assist underachievers to strive toward their intellectual potential.

## CHAPTER III

### Results and Conclusions

Underachievement among gifted students is not something they were born with but rather a mindset they acquired as their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors were shaped by the forces of family, peers, society, and school. These underachievers generally have a poor self-concept with low self-esteem. They usually have developed several defenses to hide behind because they do not believe they can achieve even if they made the effort. Some gifted underachievers have a great deal of difficulty relating effort with outcomes. Underachievers also avoid participation in activities, school and extra curricular, because they view it as a competition and they choose only to become involved when they are certain they can win. Underachievers need to learn to handle losing and also learn to continue to try even when the tasks become difficult.

Underachieving students direct most of their energies at avoiding learning in either dependent or dominant ways. The dependent underachievers try to manipulate others, especially parents and teachers, to help them with all

aspects of their work so it is never challenging and they never have to confront struggle or possible failure. Dependent underachievers must be weaned from their attention addiction by adults positively insisting on their completion of independent activities. Sympathy and one-to-one instructions only hinder dependent underachievers' growth to becoming autonomous learners. For these gifted, schools should set up difficult work with ensured opportunities for success. These children need to learn strategies to persevere so they will not resort to relying on others when tasks become challenging. Adults can not give these underachievers self-confidence. However, by standing back and letting the child struggle through, adults help the dependent underachiever gain internal well-being.<sup>89</sup>

Dominant underachievers have been given too much power in their lifetime and have come to expect it. They are just as attention addicted as the dependent underachievers. However, in their continuous quest for control, their attention seeking actions are often more inappropriate and abrasive. These underachievers do not seem to accept "no" from adults and become angry and unreasonable when moderate discipline is enforced. The determined, rigid approach to discipline by parents or schools will usually challenge the dominant underachievers to fight back. Instead, the children need to sense that

the parents and/or schools see their qualities and strengths, as well as their weaknesses, and will work with them, allowing them some control but within clear, defined limits. Because dominant underachievers are so aggressive and have been manipulators in the past it would be wise for the parent/teacher to write down the negotiated limits or parameters for future reference. This child may suffer from selective memory loss and twist the verbal agreement to his/her advantage at a later date if it is not committed to writing at the onset.<sup>90</sup>

All children, and especially underachievers, need clear "yeses" and "nos". They need adults to be firm and positive and, most important of all, they need consistency.

Most of both the dependent and dominant underachievers began school with high achievements and IQs, but by the time they reached the middle grades their underachievement has become a genuine lifestyle and major educational interventions are required to break these cycles. Their downward cycle of achievement continues because they have found successful tactics for survival which may be comfortable to them, have low self-esteem, and they feel powerless to change the direction of their life. They have not been able to build self-confidence because confidence comes only from real accomplishments.

Most of the literature and research advocated differentiated curricula for gifted underachievers which capitalized on their strengths and interests and helped them gradually improve their skills, attitudes, and self-concept. Much of the research also strongly suggested the need to teach all underachievers problem-solving and processing skills. These students also need to learn to cope with defeat and to continue when the tasks become difficult. Biographies of famous gifted adults relating their struggles and mistakes, especially in their earlier lives, are often helpful in assisting underachievers to cope with setbacks and to put their life struggles in perspective.<sup>91</sup> When gains are made by the underachievers, simple acknowledgements by adults of their recognition of the underachievers' success does more to build self-confidence than abundant praise.

Gifted underachievers with physical and learning handicaps need to be taught strategies to help them learn more successfully. Gifted learning disabled students need to alter their intellectual processing from their weaker to their stronger areas. The adults in their lives need to assist them in discovering these paths around their disabilities. More time allowances need to be made for these gifted learning disabled students for the substitution of one performance for another. These children are also in special need of counseling to help



them see their own strengths as well as their weaknesses and to develop realistic self-concepts. Gifted handicapped children are especially susceptible to frustrations because their physical or processing handicaps stifle their superior intellect.

### Gifted Identification

The identification of the underachieving gifted child is difficult because the superior intellect may enable the child to make satisfactory gains without revealing that they are working below their potential. This superior intellect could also camouflage a child with learning disabilities where they are not identified for either gifted or learning disabled programs. It is imperative that the person in charge of the initial screening for gifted identification look at all the child's records, not just the most recent, including achievement and IQ scores from the beginning of his/her schooling. Declines in grades, achievement test scores, and IQ scores for two or three years are meaningful and signal underachievement. IQ scores may drop from 10-15 points when a child is underachieving.

During the initial screening for potential gifted candidates, IQ scores of lower than 130 should be considered when the individual shows a unique or superior skill in one area. Learning disabled children do not

generally score well verbally but may in other areas and this could be due to their giftedness. The identification procedures should stay away from weighting the verbal skill too heavily for the learning disabled population.<sup>92</sup>

Gifted identification should take into account the nature of the student population and provide for ways to overcome or at least identify overall deterrents of any culturally or economically disadvantaged group. The school personnel in charge of the screening, testing, and scoring may also require inservice on the various factors affecting these populations. In the case of the culturally different, parental and peer recommendations may be beneficial.<sup>93</sup> Identification for the culturally and economically disadvantaged may also need special consideration based on their superior potential rather than performance.<sup>94</sup>

Teacher nominations for the poor, culturally disadvantaged, young, and handicapped are often inaccurate. Thorough inservice on gifted characteristics of the gifted minority and handicapped children should improve the teacher recommendation accuracy. Eisenberg and Epstein found peer and self-nomination with the handicapped to be more accurate than teacher nomination. In their studies of handicapped children who nominated themselves, nine out of ten were correct.<sup>95</sup>

In the research, no single test instrument was proven to be more accurate in identifying giftedness for all students. Ehrlich found the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale to be the best for identifying young culturally disadvantaged and the WISC-R was mentioned frequently for the gifted learning disabled child.

Identification of gifted underachievers, for whatever reasons, remains difficult. A multi-dimensional approach using multi-criteria offers the most opportunities for signals of a child's intellect to emerge so the school personnel can recognize it and plan programs more suitable for the child and his/her needs.

## CHAPTER IV

### Summary

Schools need to become more aware of the characteristics and causes of underachievement so they may assist all students, but especially the intellectually gifted, in achieving more closely to their potential. The teaching staff needs to be more cognizant of these characteristics and causes so they create positive, challenging classrooms which do not perpetuate the helplessness of the dependent underachiever nor antagonize the dominant underachiever.

### Conclusions

From the review of the literature, there are specific characteristics of underachievers, pressures that impact more heavily on the gifted and increase their tendencies toward underachievement, and causes which perpetuate the underachievement syndrome. This underachievement cycle is a pattern learned by the child, from past perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, that has led to his/her low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence. The longer a child has maintained this underachievement life style, the

more difficult it is to remedy. There are several strategies that can be employed by parents and schools to help eliminate opportunities for underachieving children to hide behind the cloak of their underachievement and to create environments where these children are more independent and are successfully striving toward their personal and intellectual potential. Self-confidence is not something that can be bestowed upon children by parents or teachers, but rather it is something that must be earned. This confidence in ones' self grows each time the underachiever accomplishes a task successfully on their own.

#### Recommendation

Several recommendations emerged from the literature for parents and schools to help prevent or remedy underachievement. General suggestions that apply to both groups include referential speaking, implied messages, and expectations. Referential speaking refers to parents or teachers talking about the child or an event when the child is within hearing range. Although the child may appear preoccupied, the messages relayed in referential speaking are stronger than any spoken directly to the child. The child assumes that since the parent or teacher is talking to another adult the message is more true and

important. This has a tremendous long term effect on the child. High but attainable expectations are important to be stated to the child directly and indirectly by adult actions. Implied messages conveyed by adults' actions and attitudes toward the child carry a greater impact with the child than words stated directly to him/her. It is also very important to get the message across to the child that sometimes it takes lots of effort to accomplish what he/she wants and not every attempt will be successful. However, their superior abilities to succeed in school will sooner or later extend their options for lifetime winning.

#### Recommendations for Parents

Modeling of effort, hard work, and satisfaction in accomplishments are very important messages parents send subconsciously. All children, but especially boys, need same-sex models by third or fourth grade. Parents must also tell the child they expect them to be responsible for themselves in certain areas and then allow the child to assume those responsibilities. They must be very careful and not "counteridentify", which is to change a child's idea and remake it into what the parent wants, in areas in which they have given the child responsibility because this undermines the child's self-confidence.

Parents need to help children organize their time and work at home so it is conducive to achievement and it alleviates old patterns which enhances underachievement. Children need designated, isolated areas in which to work, away from adults and any distractions. The kitchen table is the worst place because of the traffic flow and the convenience in receiving assistance. Dependent children especially need to be trained to come ask for help after they have made one or more attempts. Parents should refrain from checking the homework until it is all completed. It is also important that parents do not allow their child's time to be over scheduled; this adds unnecessary pressure to the child.

Parents should consistently send clear and direct messages about the central role that the school and learning plays in life and voice their respect for educational institutions and teachers. It is also important that parents do not compensate for the child's lack of competitiveness and downplay his/her giftedness by stressing the "well-rounded" image. So often parents promote social relationships and peer acceptance, especially at the Junior and senior high levels, at the expense of the giftedness. This is an implied message that popularity is as or more important than academic achievement. Parents should also not encourage their child to have friends around all the time because this



encourages the child to succumb to peer pressure rather than being true to themselves.

Messages, either spoken or implied, sent from both parents should be consistent and not conflicting. Parents must show mutual respect for each other's opinions and accomplishments to provide ideal models for both sexes. Parent rivalry or making one parent the "ogre" allows the child to align themselves with the parent expecting the least from them.

Gifted girls need to be taught the typical "male" characteristics of aggressiveness, ambitiousness, analytical ability, assertiveness, competitiveness, leadership ability, independence, and self-reliance as well as the nurturing, compassionate ones. Young girls should always be sent to school ready for active participation and not dressed like a doll to be observed and kept clean. A broad array of toys should also be available for young girls, especially manipulatives and those that generate active solutions of problems. Gifted girls should be supported by their parents in their academic intensity even when they are not like the average child their age. Parents should insist that their gifted daughter remain in accelerated mathematics and science courses through high school and always keep their career aspirations high. Gifted girls should be encouraged to aim for higher education and professional careers and

their academics should not take second place to socializing.

#### Recommendations for Schools

Schools must identify the gifted underachievers and where possible alleviate as many of the stumbling blocks to their achievement as possible. These students need curriculums that incorporate their strengths and interests and avoid their intense dislikes or phobias until they are better equipped to deal with them. The teachers of these underachievers need to be consistent, positive, and moderate disciplinarians because classrooms that are too flexible are just as detrimental to the underachiever as those which are too strict. The curriculum needs to have creativity, problem solving, productivity, and provide for divergent thinking opportunities with less drill, memorization, and practice when the gifted can succeed without it. The learning materials should be interesting, challenging, and include humor. If the gifted are doing the activities perfectly all of the time, they are not being challenged. The process of learning to study and to enjoy difficult tasks is critical to the gifted child's growth and needs to be incorporated in the classroom.

Counseling for gifted is much more important than helping them select class schedules. Counselors need to insist that the gifted underachievers remain in the

advanced math and science courses if they have the necessary skills. They also need to provide these children with non-sexist career guidance which encourages high professional aspirations. Gifted students need mentors and same-sex role models, especially at the junior and senior high levels. They also would profit from peer support groups with successful gifted personalities as speakers. These groups should also allow time for discussions concerning the nature of giftedness, pressures of being gifted, and some successful coping strategies.

Gifted handicapped students need programs which foster their skills in the gifted areas as well as helping them to overcome their handicaps. These children must also be made aware of the opportunities available to them and the most successful ways to work toward their intellectual potential.

Teachers need thorough inservice for a greater understanding of the clues signaling both giftedness and underachievement. They are the keys to the discovery of both in their classrooms. It is also crucial that they understand that exceptional ability in one area will not necessarily transcend to all other areas. In dealing with the gifted underachievers teachers need to decrease classroom competition and encourage self-competition which fosters confidence in dealing with winning and losing. They need to create classrooms that encourage independence

and refrain from helping the dependent underachievers until they have attempted the work and then requested the help. The teachers' expectations affect the children's outcomes tremendously. They must believe these underachievers can and will make it.

Schools must communicate positively and consistently with the parents for the most success to occur. By showing a sensitivity to the pressures the parents feel, schools win more support. It is also necessary for the school personnel to weigh achievement less and potential more when they are screening for giftedness.

Gifted underachievement is a learned pattern that can be corrected. The earlier it is detected the greater the chances for success and the less time required for remedy. The future belongs to the intelligent. Thus, it becomes imperative to correctly identify underachieving gifted individuals and aid them in reaching their potential for the benefit of themselves and society.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>John Curtis Gowan and Paul Torrance, Educating the Ablest. (Itasca, IL: F>E> Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>Sylvia Rimm, "Why Do Bright Children Underachieve?" G/C/T, (November/December, 1987), 30.

<sup>3</sup>Joanne R. Whitmore, "Recognizing and Developing Hidden Giftedness," The Elementary School Journal, LXXXII (January, 1982), 274.

<sup>4</sup>Marcia Peterson Weill, "Gifted/Learning Disabled Students: Their Potential May Be Buried Treasure," Clearing House, LX (April, 1987), 343.

<sup>5</sup>June Maker, Providing Programs For The Gifted Handicapped. (Reston, VA: Council For Exceptional Children, 1977), 18.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>7</sup>Sylvia Rimm, "Identifying Underachievement: The Characteristic Approach," G/C/T, (November/December, 1985), 2.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel Kirk and James J. Gallagher, Educating Exceptional Children. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 81.

<sup>9</sup>Rimm, "Why Do Bright Children," 30.

<sup>10</sup>Joanne Whitmore, "Conceptualizing The Issues Of Underserved Populations Of Gifted Students," Journal Of The Education Of The Gifted, ( Spring, 1987), 145.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>12</sup>Sylvia Rimm speech, 2nd National Underachievement Institute, (Oconomowoc, WI, July 12, 1988).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Sylvia Rimm, Underachievement Syndrome-Causes And Cures. (Watertown, WI: Apple Publishing, 1986), 3.

<sup>15</sup>Rimm Institute notes, July 12, 1988.

<sup>16</sup>Joanne Whitmore, Giftedness, Conflict, And Underachievement. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1980), 88.

<sup>17</sup>Gary Davis and Sylvia Rimm, Education Of The Gifted And Talented. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), 283.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. 325.

<sup>19</sup>Whitmore, "Conceptualizing The Issues," 145.

<sup>20</sup>Whitmore, Giftedness, Conflict, And Underachievement, 76.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. 76.

<sup>22</sup>Merle Karnes and Lawrence Johnson, "Identification And Assessment Of Gifted/Talented Handicapped And Nonhandicapped Children In Early Childhood." Journal Of Children In Contemporary Society, XVIII (Spring/Summer, 1986), 36.

<sup>23</sup>Merle Karnes and Lawrence Johnson, "An Imperative: Programming For The Young Gifted/Talented." Journal For The Education Of The Gifted, X (Spring, 1987), 195.

<sup>24</sup>Richard Bagley and others, "Identifying The Talented And Gifted Students, Oregon Series On Talented And Gifted Education," (ERIC 185712), 24.

<sup>25</sup>Virginia Ehrlich, "Recognizing Superior Cognitive Abilities In Disadvantaged, Minority, And Other Diverse Populations," Journal Of Children In Contemporary Society XVIII (Spring/Summer, 1986), 60-61.

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<sup>27</sup>Phillip Perrone and Robert A. Male, The Developmental Education And Guidance Of Talented Learners. (Rockville, MD: Aspen Publication, 1981), 162.

<sup>28</sup>Ehrlich, "Recognizing Superior Cognitive Abilities," 63.

<sup>29</sup>Pricilla Vail, The World Of The Gifted Child (New York, NY: Walker and Company, 1979), 16.

<sup>30</sup>Gowan and Torrance, Educating The Ablest, 56.

<sup>31</sup>Davis and Rimm, Education Of The Gifted, 254.



<sup>32</sup>Brian Hemmings, "The Gifted/Handicapped: Some Basic Issues," Exceptional Child, XXXII (March, 1985), 58.

<sup>33</sup>Donna Suter and Joan Wolf, "Issues In The Identification And Programming Of The Gifted/Learning Disabled Child," Journal For The Education Of The Gifted, X (Spring, 1987), 227.

<sup>34</sup>Karen Waldron and others, "Learning Disabilities And Giftedness Identification Based On Self Concept, Behavior, And Academic Patterns," Journal Of Learning Disabilities, XX (August/September, 1987), 426.

<sup>35</sup>Weill, "Gifted/Learning Disabled Students," 342.

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<sup>37</sup>Suter and Wolf, "Issues In The Identification," 235.

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<sup>39</sup>Merle Karnes and Lawrence Johnson, "Early Identification And Programming For Gifted/Talented Handicapped" Topics In Early Childhood Special Education, VI (Spring, 1986), 51.

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<sup>41</sup>Kirk and Gallagher, Educating Exceptional Children, 79.

<sup>42</sup>Geraldine Scholl, The School Psychologist And The Exceptional Child. (Reston, VA: Council For Exceptional Children, 1985), 71.

<sup>43</sup>Barbara Kerr, Smart Girls. Gifted Women. (Columbus, OH: Ohio Psychology Publishing Company, 1987), 81.

<sup>44</sup>Joe Khatena, Educational Psychology Of The Gifted. (New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, 1982), 231.

<sup>45</sup>Kerr, Smart Girls. Gifted Women, 133.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 137.

<sup>48</sup>Khatena, Educational Psychology Of The Gifted, 235.



<sup>49</sup>Ehrlich, "Recognizing Superior Cognitive Abilities," 66.

<sup>50</sup>Joanne Whitmore, "Recognizing And Developing Hidden Giftedness," The Elementary School Journal, LXXXII (January, 1982), 275.

<sup>51</sup>Ehrlich, "Recognizing Superior Cognitive Abilities," 66.

<sup>52</sup>Vail, The World Of The Gifted Child, 40.

<sup>53</sup>Whitmore, "Conceptualizing The Issues," 146-148.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 146.

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<sup>56</sup>Rimm, Underachievement Syndrome, 294.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 295.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 295-296.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 296.

<sup>61</sup>Rimm Institute notes, July 11, 1988.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Rimm, "Why Do Bright Children," 30-34.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 30-32.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

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- <sup>74</sup>Karnes and Johnson, "An Imperative," 205.
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- <sup>76</sup>Robert C. Kanoy and others, "Locus Of Control Self-Concept In Achieving And Underachieving," Psychology In The Schools, XVII (1980), 395-398.
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- <sup>78</sup>Joanne Whitmore, "Preventing Severe Underachievement And Developing Motivation," Journal Of Children In Contemporary Society, XVIII (Spring/Summer, 1986), 121.
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- <sup>83</sup>Ehrlich, "Recognizing Superior Cognitive," 59.
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- <sup>89</sup>Sylvia Rimm, "How To Reach Underachievers," Instructor, (September, 1985), 74.
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